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ON PAGE 14

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The Uses of Tradecraft

MOLE

By William Hood.
317 pp. New York:
W. W. Norton & Co. \$15.95.

By PHILIP TAUBMAN

SINCE the United States started actively collecting intelligence about the Soviet Union at the end of World War II, only a handful of Soviet officials have turned against their country and become American secret agents. In the intelligence business such spies are known as penetration agents or moles. Their activity is probably the most dramatic and dangerous kind of espionage. The threat of exposure is constant, the risks and pressures involved are almost unbearable and, if the mole is detected, the penalty is often quick execution for treason.

Pyotr Semyonovich Popov, a major in Soviet military intelligence, was the first Russian official successfully recruited by the Central Intelligence Agency. From 1952 to 1958 he used his position inside the Soviet intelligence apparatus to provide the United States with a wealth of information about Soviet military capabilities and international espionage operations. This book is an account of the C.I.A.'s relationship with Popov from the moment the Russian made his initial approach by slipping a letter into the parked car of an American intelligence officer in Vienna to the day in Moscow when he signaled that he had been exposed. William Hood, the author, was operations chief of the C.I.A. station in Vienna at the time Popov dropped his letter off, and he played a key role in bringing the Soviet agent into the American intelligence network.

Although Mr. Hood, who was a career intelligence officer, lacks a polished writing style, he is surprisingly skilled at telling the story. The book moves along crisply and builds to a dramatic conclusion with the kind of mounting tension one would expect to find in the best novels about espionage. At the same time, Mr. Hood manages unobtrusively to work in short primers on the organization and operations of American and Soviet intelligence agencies, plus fascinating descriptions of espionage methods — known as tradecraft — including details about the care and feeding of a mole.

Popov's cooperation with the C.I.A. was brazen. Apparently motivated by deeply felt anger at Soviet exploitation of Russian peasants, including his family, Popov initiated the association with the C.I.A. and carried on the relationship with abandon. In Vienna, and later in Berlin, he boldly ignored Soviet security by meeting with American agents and delivering copies of secret documents. Fueled during these meetings with ample amounts of vodka and smoked sturgeon provided by the Americans, Popov described the organization of the Soviet military command, pro-

vided the names of Russian intelligence agents in Europe and gave the C.I.A. a priceless inside look at the Soviet's use of "illegal" agents, spies who infiltrate a target country without diplomatic cover and operate on their own.

In the end, just such an illegal agent may have been Popov's undoing. While working in East Berlin, Popov provided the C.I.A. with the name of a female Soviet agent who was being trained to infiltrate the United States where she would rendezvous with her husband who was already stationed there. Popov's warning sent the Federal Bureau of Investigation scrambling to keep the woman under surveillance when she reached New York. She and her husband somehow detected the surveillance and reported it to their superiors after they slipped out of the country. Their report sparked a massive investigation which apparently lead directly to Popov, who had been the woman's control officer in East Berlin. The Soviet authorities may also have received an assist from their own mole, a British intelligence official in Berlin who inadvertently learned that the C.I.A. was using a senior Soviet intelligence officer stationed in East Germany as a mole.

Mr. Hood, who received approval from the C.I.A. to publish this book, uses pseudonyms for almost all C.I.A. officials, including himself. In the book, one assumes, he is the character called Amos Booth, the operations chief in Vienna.

Mr. Hood fails to explain whether the conversations with Popov, which he quotes at length, are reconstructions based on personal notes or interviews of other people who were present at debriefings of Popov, or whether they were drawn from transcripts of the C.I.A.'s interviews with the Russian.

At the end of the book, after Popov is exposed and called back to Moscow for interrogation, the author discusses the various possible ways the Russian might have been unmasked. He introduces a large amount of new material about other Soviet officials who became American moles, and the result is a final chapter of convoluted and confusing speculation about whether these spies were double agents. This otherwise excellent book deserved a better ending. ■

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